

Throughout my work in Congress, I have never once forgotten that this nation owes its strong history - and its promising future - in solid part to the work and commitment of our brave servicemen and women. In return for the sacrifices and life-and-death struggles they endure everyday, our government must, at minimum, ensure that our veterans receive excellent care and transition assistance at their homecoming. Our veterans undeniably have made protecting American lives and interests their first priority. It is only fitting that we, in turn, make their well-being a national priority.

My office can serve as a primary resource for returning veterans. If you have questions about federal benefits, or are experiencing trouble receiving them please contact my Utica, NY Office at 315-793-8146 or [click here](#) for information on how to submit constituent casework to our office.

It may interest you to know that this Congress, with my strong support, has continued its focus and efforts on improving the quality of care and depth of assistance for our country's returning soldiers. I look forward to building upon the successes of the past two years, which included passing the largest funding increase in the history of the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA), \$16.3 billion in additional support.

The Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act, enacted in 2008, veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan may apply for new and expanded college opportunities as a result of the Post-9/11 GI Bill. The legislation takes effect on August 1, 2009, and veterans were permitted to apply as of May 1, 2009. New benefits include:

- Tuition and fees of up to the maximum in-state tuition and fees at a public institution in state;
- A monthly housing allowance at the location of the school, based on the Basic Allowance for Housing for an E-5 with dependents;
- An annual books and supplies stipend of up to \$1,000; and
- The ability to transfer your benefits to a spouse or child.

For more information, call toll free 1-888-GI-BILL-1 (1-888-442-4551) to speak with a Veterans Benefits Counselor, OR visit: www.gibill.va.gov/

Congress recently passed, and the President signed into law, the Fiscal Year 2009 Supplemental Appropriations Act, H.R. 2346, which provides 185,000 service members with \$500 stipends for every month their enlistments were involuntarily extended under stop-loss orders. It also gives our service members a 3.4 percent pay raise, funds construction of nine wounded warrior support complexes and 25 child care centers, and includes an additional \$1.8 billion for defense health and programs to support military families. [Summary of Major Provisions](#)

Measures Passed in the House during the 111th Congress:

I voted for the Fiscal Year 2010 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill, which includes record funding levels for Defense Department facilities and VA health care services, including \$4.6 billion for mental health and \$3.2 billion for programs aimed at caring for homeless vets. In addition, this bill will allow VA to hire 1,200 claims processors, bringing the total of new hires to 8,300 since January 2007. [Summary of Major Provisions](#)

I voted for the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act (H.R. 1016), to authorize Congress to approve Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical care appropriations one year in advance of the start of each fiscal year. This will provide the VA with sufficient time to plan how to deliver the most efficient and effective care to an increasing number of veterans with increasingly complex medical conditions. [Read More](#)

I voted for the Disabled Military Retiree Relief Act (H.R. 2990), to provide a one-year fix for the disabled veterans tax for disabled military retirees with less than 20 years of service. This bill would allow these service members who have been retired for severe disability to receive both their military retirement and VA disability pay. Many of these service members were on track to serve a full military career, but were blocked from serving 20 years because of their disabilities. *Note: The text of H.R. 2990 has been incorporated into the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010, H.R. 2647.*

Laws Enacted during the 110th Congress:

The Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act (enacted as part of H.R. 2642) restores full four-year college scholarships for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans - on a par with educational benefits available after World War II. This new GI Bill will make Iraq and Afghanistan veterans part of an American economic recovery, just as the veterans of World War II helped grow and strengthen the American middle class. [Read More](#)

The Heroes Earnings Assistance and Relief Tax (HEART) Act (H.R. 6081) provides \$2 billion in tax relief for military families, including IRS provisions to: permit active duty reservists to make penalty-free withdrawals from retirement plans; permit an employer to make contributions to a qualified retirement plan on behalf of an employee killed or disabled in combat; count extra pay for active duty military personnel from their previous civilian employer for retirement purposes; and permit recipients of military death benefit gratuities to roll over the amounts received, tax-free, to a Roth IRA or an Education Savings Account. [Read More](#)

While it is important to develop new initiatives to offer support for our troops and veterans, it is also critical that that our government provide the necessary funding and bureaucratic infrastructure to ensure that the DOD and VA are able to implement recently-passed policies to their fullest extent. To follow-up on my previous commitment to this issue and facilitate this law's immediate and thorough enactment, I have sent a letter to the House Appropriations Committee requesting \$10 million in the FY 2009 appropriations bill for the [Model Programs for Centers of Excellence for Veteran Student Access](#)

. This program was authorized in the Higher Education Opportunity Act, which became law in August 2008, in order to provide resources for colleges and universities to establish a one-stop support system on campus to help veterans succeed and graduate. This funding is being requested to specifically assist colleges with accommodating the expansion of the GI Bill passed in the last Congress. The Veteran Student Access model program will support veterans on campus by coordinating services to address the academic, financial, physical and social needs of veteran students. As you are aware, veterans face a host of unique challenges in educational settings, such as coordinating veterans' health and education benefits with student financial aid and coping with mental or physical health challenges stemming from service in a war zone. It is estimated that an investment of up to \$10 million could help up to 40 colleges implement centers for veteran student access.